The readings in *Language Awareness* emphasize the crucial role language plays in virtually every aspect of our lives, and they reveal the essential elements of the writer’s craft. As you read and study the selections in this text, you will discover the power of language in our world. You will become more aware of your own language usage and how it affects others, and, at the same time, you will become more sensitive to how the language of others affects you. An additional benefit of close, critical reading is that you will become more familiar with different types of writing and learn how good writers make decisions about writing strategies and techniques. All of these insights will help you become a more thoughtful, discerning reader and, equally important, a better writer.

As the word *critical* suggests, reading critically means questioning what you read in a thoughtful, organized way and with an alert, inquiring mind. Critical reading is a skill you need if you are truly to engage and understand the content of a piece of writing as well as the craft that shapes the writer’s ideas into an effective, efficient, and presentable form. Never accept what you read simply because it’s in print. Instead, scrutinize it, challenge it, and think about its meaning and significance.

Critical reading is also a skill that takes time and practice to acquire. While most of us learned before we got to college how to read for content and summarize what a writer said, not all of us learned how to analyze what we were reading. Reading critically is like engaging a writer in a conversation—asking for the meaning of a particular statement, questioning the definition of a crucial term, or demanding more evidence to support a generalization. In addition, critical reading requires asking ourselves why we like one piece of writing and not another, or why one argument is more believable or convincing than another.

As you learn more about reading thoughtfully and purposefully, you will come to a better understanding of both the content and the craft of any piece of writing. As an added bonus, learning to read critically will help you read your own work with more insight and, as a result, write more persuasively.
GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR READING

Critical reading requires, first of all, that you commit time and effort. Second, it requires that you apply goodwill and energy to understanding and appreciating what you are reading, even if the subject matter does not immediately appeal to you. Remember, your mission is twofold: You must analyze and comprehend the content of what you are reading; and then you must understand the writer’s methods to see firsthand the kinds of choices a writer makes in his or her writing.

To help you grow as a critical reader and to get the most out of what you read, use the following classroom-proven steps:

1. Prepare yourself to read the selection.
2. Read the selection to get an overview of it.
3. Annotate the selection with marginal notes.
4. Summarize the selection in your own words.
5. Analyze the selection to come to an understanding of it.
6. Complete the “Language in Action” activity to discover the far-reaching connections between the selection and language in the real world.

To demonstrate how these steps can work for you, we’ve applied them to an essay by the popular nonfiction writer Natalie Goldberg. Like the other selections in Language Awareness, Goldberg’s essay “Be Specific” is accessible and speaks to an important contemporary language issue. She points to the importance of using specific names in speaking and writing, and she demonstrates how we give things their proper dignity and integrity when we name them.

I. Prepare Yourself to Read the Selection

Instead of diving into any given selection in Language Awareness or any other book, there are a few things that you can do that will prepare you to get the most out of what you will read. It’s helpful, for example, to get a context for what you’ll read. What’s the essay about? What do you know about the writer’s background and reputation? Where was the essay first published? Who was the intended audience for the essay? And, finally, how much do you already know about the subject of the reading selection? We encourage you to consider carefully the materials that precede each selection in this book. Each selection begins with a title, headnote, and journal prompt. From the title you often discover the writer’s position on an issue or attitude toward the topic. On occasion, the title can give clues about the intended audience and the writer’s purpose in writing the piece. The headnote contains a biographical note about the author followed by publication information and rhetorical highlights about the selection. In addition to information on the person’s life and work, you’ll read about his or her reputation and authority to write on the subject of the piece. The

publication information indicates when the essay was published and in what book or magazine it first appeared. This information, in turn, gives you insight about the intended audience. The rhetorical highlights direct your attention to one or more aspects of how the selection was written. Finally, the Writing to Discover journal prompt encourages you to collect your thoughts and opinions about the topic or related issues before you commence reading. The journal prompt makes it easy to keep a record of your own knowledge or thinking on a topic before you see what the writer has to offer.

To understand how these context-building materials can work for you, carefully review the following informational materials that accompany Natalie Goldberg’s essay “Be Specific.”

Be Specific

Natalie Goldberg

Born in 1948, author Natalie Goldberg is a teacher of writing who has conducted writing workshops across the country. In addition to her classes and workshops, Goldberg shares her love of writing in her books; she has made writing about writing her specialty. Her first and best-known work, Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within, was published in 1986. Goldberg’s advice to would-be writers is practical and pithy, on the one hand, and mystical or spiritual in its call to writers to know and become more connected to the environment. In short, as one reviewer observed, “Goldberg teaches us not only how to write better, but how to live better.” Writing Down the Bones was followed by five more books about writing: Wild Mind: Living the Writer’s Life (1990), Living Color: A Writer Paints Her World (1996), Thunder and Lightning: Cracking Open the Writer’s Craft (2000), and Old Friend from Far Away: The Practice of Writing Memoir (2008). Altogether, more than a million copies of these books are now in print. Goldberg has also written fiction: the novel Banana Rose (1995), and the autobiography: Long Quiet Highway: Waking Up in America (1993) and The Great Failure: A Bartender, a Monk, and My Unlikely Path to Truth (2004).

“Be Specific” is taken from Goldberg’s Writing Down the Bones and is representative of the book as a whole. Notice the ways in which Goldberg demonstrates her advice to be specific, to use names whenever possible. Which of her many examples resonates best with you?
WRITING TO DISCOVER: Suppose someone says to you, “I walked in the woods today.” What do you envision? Write down what you see in your mind’s eye. Now suppose someone says, “I walked in the redwood forest today.” Again, write what you see. What’s different about your two descriptions, and why?

From reading these preliminary materials, what expectations do you have for the selection itself? How does this knowledge equip you to engage the selection before you actually read it? From the title you probably inferred that Goldberg will explain what she means by the command “be specific” and what is to be gained by following this advice. Her purpose clearly is to give advice to writers. The biographical note reveals that Goldberg has written a number of books detailing her own experiences with writing as well as giving advice to aspiring writers of all ages, and that she has taught writing courses and conducted writing workshops for many years. This experience gives her the knowledge and authority to write on this topic. The publication information indicates that the subject of Goldberg’s essay is an argument in favor of being specific in writing. Because the selection was first published as part of her book Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within, Goldberg can anticipate that readers, who can assume are looking for writing advice, will be open to her argument. The rhetorical highlight alerts you to be mindful of how Goldberg practices what she’s preaching in her own writing and prompts you to consider her examples. Finally, the journal prompt—a hands-on exercise in specificity—asks you to describe in writing the visuals conjured up in your mind by two statements and to draw conclusions about any differences you note in your responses.

It’s always a good practice to take several minutes before reading a selection to reflect on what you already know about a particular issue and where you stand on it and why. After reading Goldberg’s essay, you can compare your own experiences with being specific—or being unspecific—in writing with those of Goldberg.

2. Read the Selection to Get an Overview of It

Always read the selection at least twice, no matter how long it is. The first reading gives you a chance to get acquainted with the essay and to form first impressions. With the first reading you want to get an overall sense of what the writer is saying, keeping in mind the essay’s title and what you learned about the writer in the headnote. The essay will offer you information, ideas, and arguments—some you may have expected; some you may not have. As you read, you may find yourself questioning or modifying your sense of what the writer is saying. Resist the urge to annotate at this point; instead, concentrate on the content, on the main points of what’s being said. Now read Natalie Goldberg’s essay.

Be Specific

Natalie Goldberg

Be specific. Don’t say “fruit.” Tell what kind of fruit—“It is a pomegranate.” Give things the dignity of their names. Just as with human beings, it is rude to say, “Hey, girl, get in line.” That “girl” has a name. (As a matter of fact, if she’s at least twenty years old, she’s a woman, not a “girl” at all.) Things, too, have names. It is much better to say “the geranium in the window” than “the flower in the window.” “Geranium”—that one word gives us a much more specific picture. It penetrates more deeply into the beingness of that flower. It immediately gives us the scene by the window—red petals, green circular leaves, all straining toward sunlight.

About ten years ago I decided I had to learn the names of plants and flowers in my environment. I bought a book on them and walked down the tree-lined streets of Boulder, examining leaf, bark, and seed, trying to match them up with their descriptions and names in the book. Maple, elm, oak, locust. I usually tried to cheat by asking people working in their yards the names of the flowers and trees growing there. I was amazed how few people had any idea of the names of the live beings inhabiting their little plot of land.

When we know the name of something, it brings us closer to the ground. It takes the blur out of our mind; it connects us to the earth. If I walk down the street and see “dogwood,” “forystha,” I feel more friendly toward the environment. I am noticing what is around me and can name it. It makes me more awake.

If you read the poems of William Carlos Williams, you will see how specific he is about plants, trees, flowers—chicory, daisy, locust, poplar, quince, primrose, black-eyed Susan, lilacs—each has its own integrity. Williams says, “Write what’s in front of your nose.” It’s good for us to know what is in front of our noses. Not just “daisy,” but how the flower is in the season we are looking at it—“The daysyehugging the earth/in August . . . brownedged/green and pointed scales/armor his yellow.” Continue to hone your awareness: to the name, to the month, to the day, and finally to the moment.

Williams also says: “No idea, but in things.” Study what is “in front of your nose.” By saying “geranium” instead of “flower,” you are penetrating more deeply into the present and being there. The closer we can get to what’s in front of our nose, the more it can teach us everything. “To see the World in a Grain of Sand, and a heaven in a Wild Flower . . . ”

In writing groups and classes too, it is good to quickly learn the names of all the other group members. It helps to ground you in the group and make you more attentive to each other’s work.


Learn the names of everything: birds, cheese, tractors, cars, buildings. A writer is all at once everything—an architect, French cook, farmer—and at the same time, a writer is none of these things.

Some students find it valuable to capture their first impressions, thoughts, or reactions immediately after they’ve finished reading a selection. If you keep a reading journal, record your ideas in a paragraph or two. You are now ready for the second reading of the essay, this time with pencil or pen in hand to annotate the text.

3. Annotate the Selection with Marginal Notes

As you read the essay a second time, engage it—highlight key passages and make marginal annotations. Your second reading will be quite different from your first, because you already know what the essay is about, where it is going, and how it gets there. Now you can relate the parts of the essay more accurately to the whole. Use the second reading to test your first impressions against the words on the page, developing and deepening your sense of the writer’s argument. Because you already have a general understanding of the essay’s content and structure, you can focus on the writer’s purpose and means of achieving it. You can look for features of organization and style that you can learn from and adapt to your own work.

One question that students frequently ask us is “What should I annotate?” When you annotate a text, you should do more than simply underline or highlight what you think are the important points to remember. Instead, as you read, write down your thoughts, reactions, and questions in the margins or on a separate piece of paper. Think of your annotations as an opportunity to have a conversation with the writer of the essay.

Mark what you believe to be the selection’s main point when you find it stated directly. Look for the pattern or patterns of development the author uses to explore and support that point, and record the information. If you disagree with a statement or conclusion, object in the margin: “No!” If you’re not convinced by the writer’s claims or evidence, indicate that response: “Why?” or “Who says?” or “Explain.” If you are impressed by an argument or turn of phrase, compliment the writer: “Good point.” If there are any words that you do not recognize or that seem to you to be used in a questionable way, circle them so that you can look them up in a dictionary.

Jot down whatever marginal notes come naturally to you. Most readers combine brief responses written in the margins with their own system of underlining, circling, highlighting, stars, vertical lines, and question marks.

Remember that there are no hard-and-fast rules for which elements you annotate. Choose a method of annotation that works best for you and that will make sense to you when you go back to recollect your thoughts and responses to the essay. When annotating a text, don’t be timid. Mark up your book as much as you like, or jot down as many responses in your notebook as you think will be helpful. Don’t let annotating become burdensome. A word or phrase is usually as good as a sentence. Notice how one of our students used marginal annotations to record her responses to Goldberg’s text.

Be specific. Don’t say “fruit.” Tell what kind of fruit—“it is a pomegranate.” Give things the dignity of their names. Just as with human beings, it is rude to say, “Hey, girl, get in line.” That “girl” has a name. (As a matter of fact, if she’s at least twenty years old, she’s a woman, not a “girl” at all.) Things, too, have names. It is much better to say “the geranium in the window” than “the flower in the window.” “Geranium”—that one word gives us a much more specific picture. It penetrates more deeply into the beingness of that flower. It immediately gives us the scene by the window—red petals, green circular leaves, all straining toward sunlight.

About ten years ago I decided I had to learn the names of plants and flowers in my environment. I bought a book on them and walked down the tree-lined streets of Boulder, examining leaf, bark, and seed, trying to match them up with their descriptions and names in the book. Maple, elm, oak, locust. I usually tried to cheat by asking people working in their yards the names
of the flowers and trees growing there. I was amazed how few people had any idea of the names of the live beings inhabiting their little plot of land. 

When we know the name of something, it brings us closer to the ground. It takes the blur out of our mind; it connects us to the earth. If I walk down the street and see "dogwood," "foraythia," I feel more friendly toward the environment. I am noticing what is around me and I can name it. It makes me more awake. 

If you read the poems of William Carlos Williams, you will see how specific he is about plants, trees, flowers—chicory, daisy, locust, poplar, quince, primrose, black-eyed Susan, lilacs—each has its own integrity. Williams says, "Write what's in front of your nose." It's good for us to know what is in front of our noses. Not just "daisy," but how the flower is in the season we are looking at it—"The dayeye hugging the earth/in August... browneded,... green and pointed scales/armor his yellow." Continue to hone your awareness: to the name, to the month, to the day, and finally to the moment. 

Williams also says: "No idea, but in things." Study what is "in front of your nose." By saying "geranium" instead of "flower," you are penetrating more deeply into the present and being there. The closer we can get to what's in front of our nose, the more it can teach us everything. "To see the World in a Grain of Sand, and a heaven in a Wild Flower..."

In writing groups and classes too, it is good to quickly learn the names of all the other group members. It helps to ground you in the group and make you more attentive to each other's work.

Learn the names of everything: birds, cheese, tractors, cars, buildings. A writer is all at once everything—an architect, French cook, farmer—and at the same time, a writer is none of these things. 

4. Summarize the Selection in Your Own Words

After carefully annotating the selection, you will find it worthwhile to summarize what the writer has said, to see how the main points work together to give support to the writer's thesis. An efficient way to do this is to make a simple paragraph-by-paragraph outline of what you've read. Try to capture the essence of each paragraph in a single sentence. Such an outline enables you to understand how the essay works, to see what the writer's position is and how he or she has structured the essay and organized the main ideas.

Consider the following paragraph-by-paragraph outline one of our students made after reading Goldberg's essay:

Paragraph 1: Goldberg announces her topic and demonstrates the power of names with the example of the geranium.

Paragraph 2: She recounts how she went about learning the names of plants and trees in her Colorado neighborhood.

Paragraph 3: She explains how knowing the names of things makes her feel connected to the world around her.

Paragraph 4: She uses the example of poet William Carlos Williams to support her point about the power of names.

Paragraph 5: She continues with the example of Williams to broaden the discussion of what it means to "penetrate more deeply" into the world that is "in front of your nose."

Paragraph 6: She says that knowing the names of people in your writing group or class creates community.

Paragraph 7: She advises writers to "learn the names of everything" as a way of being "at once everything" and "at the same time... none of these things."

With your paragraph-by-paragraph outline in hand, you are now ready to analyze the reading.

5. Analyze the Selection to Come to an Understanding of It

After reading the essay a second time and annotating it, you are ready to analyze it, to probe for a deeper understanding of and appreciation for what the writer has done. In analyzing an essay, you will examine its basic parts methodically to see the significance of each part and understand how they relate to one another. One of the best ways to analyze an essay is to answer a basic set of questions—questions that require you to do some critical thinking about the essay's content and form.

Each essay in *Language Awareness* is followed by a set of "Thinking Critically about the Reading" questions similar to the ones suggested here...
Questions to Help You Analyze What You Read

1. What is the writer’s main point or thesis?
2. To whom is the essay addressed? To a general audience with little or no background knowledge of the subject? To a specialized group familiar with the topic? To those who are likely to agree or disagree with the argument?
3. What is the writer’s purpose in addressing this audience?
4. What is the writer’s attitude toward the subject of the essay—positive, critical, objective, ironic, hostile?
5. What assumptions, if any, does the writer make about the subject and/or the audience? Are these assumptions explicit (stated) or implicit (unstated)?
6. What kinds of evidence does the writer use to support his or her thesis—personal experience, expert opinions, statistics? Does the writer supply enough evidence to support his or her position? Is the evidence reliable, specific, and up-to-date?
7. Does the writer address opposing views on the issue?
8. How is the essay organized and developed? Does the writer’s strategy of development suit his or her subject and purpose?
9. How effective is the essay? Is the writer convincing about his or her position?

but more specific to the essay. These questions help you analyze both the content of an essay and the writer's craft. In answering each of these questions, always look for details from the selection itself to support your position.

Having read and reread Goldberg’s essay and studied the student annotations to the text, consider the following set of student answers to the key questions listed above. Are there places where you would have answered the questions differently? Explain.

1. What is the writer’s main point or thesis?

Goldberg wants to tell her readers why it’s important for people, especially writers, to be specific and to learn the names of everything in their part of the world. She states her main point in paragraph 3: “When we know the name of something, it brings us closer to the ground. It takes the blur out of our mind; it connects us to the earth.” In short, being specific in what we call things makes us see, think, and write more clearly.

2. To whom is the essay addressed? To a general audience with little or no background knowledge of the subject? To a specialized group familiar with the topic? To those who are likely to agree or disagree with the argument?

Goldberg’s intended audience seems to be writers who are looking for advice. In paragraph 4, she quotes William Carlos Williams: “Write what’s in front of your nose.” In paragraph 6, Goldberg stresses the importance of knowing classmates’ or group members’ names and how this knowledge “helps to ground you in the group and make you more attentive to each other’s work.” In her final paragraph Goldberg acknowledges her audience of writers by emphasizing the writer’s duty to learn the names of everything.

3. What is the writer’s purpose in addressing this audience?

Goldberg’s purpose is to give her readers some direct advice about writing and life: “Be specific. More specifically(!), she advises her readers to give people and things names and to create a specific time context (month, day, moment, etc.) for what they’re describing (“Not just ‘daisy’ but how the flower is in the season we are looking at it . . .”).

4. What is the writer’s attitude toward the subject of the essay—positive, critical, objective, ironic, hostile?

Goldberg is enthusiastic and extremely positive about the importance of naming things. She believes that “[w]hen we know the name of something, it brings us closer to the ground. It takes the blur out of our mind; it connects us to the earth” and makes us more “awake” to the environment; it allows us to “[penetrate] more deeply” into what is in front of us and to learn from it; and it grounds us and makes us more attentive in a group. She’s excited to share her own experiences with learning the names of things.

5. What assumptions, if any, does the writer make about the subject and/or the audience? Are these assumptions explicit (stated) or implicit (unstated)?

Goldberg makes several key assumptions in this essay:
- The title assumes that readers will be comfortable with commands.
- The examples of “pomegranate,” “geranium,” “maple,” “elm,” “oak,” “locust,” “dogwood,” and “forsythia” assume that readers have a basic knowledge of fruits, flowers, and trees—or that they’ll be motivated enough to look them up.
- The reference to the poet William Carlos Williams assumes that the audience will know who he is and perhaps be familiar with his poetry—or, again, that they will be motivated enough to look him up. Goldberg’s footnotes, however, show that she does not assume readers will recognize the poem “Daisy” (paragraph 4) or “The Auguries of Innocence,” quoted in paragraph 5.
- Goldberg assumes that readers, after learning the names of the plants, flowers, trees, and people in their environment, will have experiences similar to the ones she has had: “I feel more friendly toward the environment. I am noticing what is around me and can name it. It makes me more awake” (paragraph 3).
6. What kinds of evidence does the writer use — personal experience, expert opinions, statistics? Does the writer supply enough evidence to support his or her position? Is the evidence reliable, specific, and up-to-date?

To support her claim that writers need to be specific, Goldberg uses the examples of "fruit/pomegranate," "girl/NAME," and "flower/geranium" in her opening paragraph — hoping that her readers will agree that the specific terms are better than the general ones. She follows these examples with personal experience: She explains how she went about learning the names of plants and flowers in Boulder, Colorado, and shares what she felt as a result. In paragraphs 4 and 5, Goldberg cites the poetry of William Carlos Williams as evidence that specific language creates great poems.

It is difficult to say whether this evidence is enough. Assuming her readers are beginning writers eager to learn, as she seems to have intended, it is probably safe to say that her evidence will be convincing. If a less receptive audience or an audience of nonwriters were reading the essay, though, more evidence or a different kind (maybe examples of how being specific helps in everyday life) might be needed.

7. Does the writer address opposing views on the issue?

While Goldberg does not directly address opposing views, she does discuss what happens when writers or speakers are not specific. For example, in paragraph 1 she says that calling someone "girl" instead of calling her by her name can be rude, which is another way of saying that it denies that person her dignity — a pretty serious charge. In addition, when she tells us how knowing the names of things brings us closer to our environment, she implies that not knowing these names actually makes us feel disconnected from the world around us — something no one wants to feel.

8. How is the essay organized and developed? Does the writer's strategy of development suit his or her subject and purpose?

Goldberg organizes her essay in a straightforward and logical manner. She introduces her topic with her central directive, "Be specific," and then immediately shows through three examples what happens when a writer is specific. She organizes the examples in the body of her essay — paragraphs 2 through 6 — by telling how she learned to be more specific, quoting William Carlos Williams's advice to "Write what's in front of your nose," and advising us that we should learn the names of people in the groups and classes we belong to. Goldberg concludes her essay where she began, by directing us to "Learn the names of everything." In learning the names of everything she reminds us that "A writer is all at once everything — an architect, French cook, farmer — and at the same time, a writer is none of these things."

Although it seems paradoxical at first, this statement, when you stop to think about it, is very empowering — you're not really an architect or a French cook or a farmer, but, when you write, you get to experience the world the way they do.

9. How effective is the essay? Is the writer convincing about his or her position?

Goldberg's essay is effective because it serves her purpose very well. She raises her readers' awareness of the value of names and demonstrates why it is so important to give things their names in order to understand our world and to write effectively about it. Her argument about being specific is convincing — after reading the essay, it's difficult to look at a flower and not wonder, at least, whether it's a tulip, poppy, daffodil, rose, or something else. Goldberg offers practical advice on how each of us can get started learning the names of things, be they the names of the other people in our class or the names of the plants, trees, and flowers on our campus.

6. Complete the “Language in Action” Activity to Discover the Far-Reaching Connections between the Selection and Language in the Real World

The "Language in Action" activities that accompany each selection in Language Awareness give you an opportunity to work with real world examples of language issues or concepts discussed in the selections, with exercises, cartoons, advertisements, photographs, poems, movie reviews, parodies, essay excerpts, syndicated columns, letters to the editor and more. Designed to be completed either in class or at home in about fifteen to twenty minutes, these activities invite you to take a hands-on approach to what you're learning from the essays and give you a chance to demonstrate your growing language aptitude. Consider the following activity that accompanied the Goldberg essay:

**LANGUAGE IN ACTION**

A useful exercise in learning to be more specific in our writing is to see the words we use for people, places, things, and ideas as being positioned somewhere on what might be called a "ladder of abstraction." In the following chart, notice how the words progress from more general to more specific.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More General</th>
<th>General</th>
<th>Specific</th>
<th>More Specific</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organism</td>
<td>Plant</td>
<td>Flower</td>
<td>Iris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle</td>
<td>Car</td>
<td>Chevrolet</td>
<td>1958 Chevrolet Impala</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using the examples above as models, try to fill in the missing parts of the following ladder of abstraction:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More General</th>
<th>General</th>
<th>Specific</th>
<th>More Specific</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing instrument</td>
<td>pen</td>
<td>Fountain pen</td>
<td>Waterman fountain pen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch food</td>
<td>Sandwich</td>
<td>Corned beef sandwich</td>
<td>Reuben</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>Dessert</td>
<td>Pie</td>
<td>Navaho</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American pie</td>
<td>Apple</td>
<td>Laguna Pueblo</td>
<td>Navajo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PRACTICE READING, ANNOTATING, AND ANALYZING

Before you read the following essay, think about its title, the biographical and rhetorical information in the headnote, and the journal prompt. Make some marginal notes of your expectations for the essay, and write out a response to the journal prompt. Then, as you read the essay itself for the first time, try not to stop; take it all in as if in one breath. The second time, however, pause to annotate key points in the text, using the marginal notes we have provided alongside each paragraph. As you read, remember the nine basic questions we listed earlier on page 10.

What's in a Name?

Henry Louis Gates Jr.


In “What’s in a Name?,” excerpted from a longer article published in the fall 1989 issue of Dissent magazine, Gates tells the story of an early encounter with the language of prejudice. In learning how one of the “bynames” used by white people to define African Americans robs them of their identity, he feels the sting of racism firsthand. Notice how Gates’s use of dialogue gives immediacy and poignancy to his narration.

WRITING TO DISCOVER: Reflect on racially charged language you have heard. For example, has anyone ever used a racial or ethnic epithet to refer to you? When did you first become aware that such terms existed? How do you feel about being characterized or defined by your race or ethnicity? If you yourself have ever used such terms, what was your intent in using them? What was the response of others?

The question of color takes up much space in these pages, but the question of color, especially in this country, operates to hide the graver questions of the self.

—JAMES BALDWIN, 1961

...blood, darky, Tar Baby, Kaffir, shine...moor, blackmoor, Jim Crow, spooks...quadroon, meriney, red bone, high yellow...Mammy, porch monkey, home, homeboy, George spearchucker, schwarze, Leroy, Smokey...moult, buck, Ethiopian, brother, sistah...

—TREY ELLIS, 1989
I had forgotten the incident completely, until I read Trey Ellis's essay, “Remember My Name,” in a recent issue of the Village Voice (June 13, 1989). But there, in the middle of an extended italicized list of the bynames of “the race” (“the race” or “our people” being the terms my parents used in polite or reverential discourse, “jigaboo” or “nigger” more commonly used in anger, jest, or pure disgust), it was: “George.” Now the events of that brief exchange return to mind so vividly that I wonder why I had forgotten it.

My father and I were walking home at dusk from his second job. He “moonlighted” as a janitor in the evenings for the telephone company. Every day but Saturday, he would come home at 3:30 from his regular job at the paper mill, wash up, eat supper, then at 4:30 head downtown to his second job. He used to make jokes frequently about a union official who moonlighted. I never got the joke, but he and his friends thought it was hilarious. All I knew was that my family always ate well, that my brother and I had new clothes to wear, and that all of the white people in Piedmont, West Virginia, treated my parents with an odd mixture of resentment and respect that even we understood at the time had something directly to do with a small but certain measure of financial security.

He had left a little early that evening because I was with him and I had to be in bed early. I could not have been more than five or six, and we had stopped off at the Cut-Rate Drug Store (where no black person in town but my father could sit down to eat, and eat off real plates with real silverware) so that I could buy some caramel ice cream, two scoops in a waffle cone, please, which I was busy licking when Mr. Wilson walked by.

Mr. Wilson was a very quiet man, whose stony, brooding, silent manner seemed designed to scare off any overtures of friendship, even from white people. He was Irish, as was one-third of our village (another third being Italian), the more affluent among whom sent their children to “Catholic School” across the bridge in Maryland. He had white straight hair, like my Uncle Joe, whom he uncannily resembled, and he carried a black worn metal lunch pail, the kind that Riley² carried on the television show. My father always spoke to him, and for reasons that we never did understand, he always spoke to my father.

“Hello, Mr. Wilson,” I heard my father say.
“Hello, George.”
I stopped licking my ice cream cone, and asked my Dad in a loud voice why Mr. Wilson had called him “George.”
“Doesn’t he know your name, Daddy? Why don’t you tell him your name? Your name isn’t George.”
For a moment I tried to think of who Mr. Wilson was; mixing Pop up with. But we didn’t have any Georges among the colored people in Piedmont; nor were there colored Georges living in the neighboring towns and working at the mill.

“Tell him your name, Daddy.”
“He knows my name, boy,” my father said after a long pause. “He calls all colored people George.”
A long silence ensued. It was “one of those things,” as my Mom would put it. Even then, that early, I knew when I was in the presence of “one of those things,” one of those things that provided a glimpse, through a rent curtain, at another world that we could not affect but that affected us. There would be a painful moment of silence, and you would wait for it to give way to a discussion of a black superstar such as Sugar Ray⁴ or Jackie Robinson⁵.

“Nobody hits better in a clutch than Jackie Robinson.”
“That’s right. Nobody.”
I never again looked Mr. Wilson in the eye.

Once you have read and reread Gates’s essay and annotated the text, write out answers to the six Thinking Critically about the Reading questions as well as the Language in Action activity found below. Then compare your answers with those of the other students in class.

THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT THE READING

1. In the epigraph to this essay, Gates presents two quotations, one by James Baldwin. What do you think Baldwin meant when he wrote, “The question of color, especially in this country [America], operates to hide the graver questions of self”? How does this statement relate to the theme of Gates’s essay?

2. torn.
2. In his opening paragraph, Gates refers to the other quotation in the epigraph—a list of bynames used to refer to African Americans that appeared in an article by Trey Ellis—and states that his reading of this article triggered a childhood memory for him. How did you first feel after reading Ellis’s list of bynames for African Americans? What did you find offensive about these racial slurs? Explain.

3. Later in his opening paragraph Gates reveals that “‘the race’ or ‘our people’ [were] the terms my parents used in polite or reverential discourse, ‘jigaboo’ or ‘nigger’ more commonly used in anger, jest, or pure disgust.” Why does Gates make so much of Mr. Wilson’s use of “George” when his own parents used words so much more obviously offensive? What do you see as the essential difference between white people using Trey Ellis’s list of terms to refer to people of color and African Americans using the same terms to refer to themselves? Explain.

4. Gates describes Mr. Wilson and provides some background information about him in paragraph 4. Why do you think is Gates’s purpose in providing this information? (Glossary: Description)

5. Explain what happens in paragraph 12. What is “one of those things,” as Gates’s mother put it? In what ways is “one of those things” really Gates’s purpose in telling his story? Why does Gates say, “I never again looked Mr. Wilson in the eye” (15)?

6. In paragraphs 5 and 6, Gates uses dialogue to capture the key exchange between his father and Mr. Wilson. What does this dialogue add to his narration? (Glossary: Narration) What would have been lost if Gates had simply described the conversation between the two men?

**LANGUAGE IN ACTION**

Comment on the importance of one’s name as revealed in the following Ann Landers column. Ann Landers is the pen name created for advice columnist Ruth Crowley in 1943 and later used by Epiphany Lederer for her “Ask Ann Landers” syndicated lifestyle advice column that was featured in newspapers across the country from 1955 to 2002. Though fictional, Ann Landers became an institution and cultural icon for the era.

**Refusal to Use Name Is the Ultimate Insult**

**Dear Ann Landers:** Boy, when you’re wrong, you’re really wrong. Apparently, you have never been the victim of a hostile, nasty, passive-aggressive person who refuses to address you by name. Well, I have.

My husband’s mother has never called me by my name in the 21 years I’ve been married to her son. Nor has she ever said “please” or “thank you,” unless someone else is within hearing distance. My husband’s children by his first wife are the same way. The people they care about are always referred to by name, but the rest of us are not called anything.

**If you still think this is a “psychological glitch,” as you said in a recent column, try speaking to someone across the room without addressing that person by name. To be nameless and talked at is the ultimate put-down, and I wish you had said so. —“Hey You” in Florida**

**Dear Florida:** Sorry I let you down. Your mother-in-law’s refusal to call you by name is, I am sure, rooted in hostility. Many years ago, Dr. Will Menninger said, “The sweetest sound in any language is the sound of your own name.” It can also be a valuable sales tool. My former husband, one of the world’s best salesmen, said if you want to make a sale, get the customer’s name, use it when you make your pitch, and he will be half sold. His own record as a salesman proved him right.

What is the meaning of Dr. Will Menninger’s statement: “The sweetest sound in any language is the sound of your own name”?

**READING AS A WRITER**

Reading and writing are the two sides of the same coin: Active critical reading is a means to help you become a better writer. By reading we can begin to see how other writers have communicated their experiences, ideas, thoughts, and feelings in their writing. We can study how they have used the various elements of the essay—thesis, unity, organization, beginnings and endings, paragraphs, transitions, effective sentences, word choice, tone, and figurative language—to say what they wanted to say. By studying the style, technique, and rhetorical strategies of other writers we learn how we might effectively do the same. The more we read and write, the more we begin to read as writers and, in turn, to write knowing what readers expect.

What does it mean to read as a writer? Most of us have not been taught to read with a writer’s eye, to ask why we like one piece of writing and not another. Likewise, most of us do not ask ourselves why one piece of writing is more believable or convincing than another. When you learn to read with a writer’s eye, you begin to answer these important questions and, in the process, come to appreciate what is involved in selecting and focusing a subject as well as the craftsmanship involved in writing—how a writer selects descriptive details, uses an unobtrusive organizational pattern, opts for fresh and lively language, chooses representative and persuasive examples, and emphasizes important points with sentence variety.

On one level, reading stimulates your thinking by providing you with subjects to write about. After reading David Raymond’s essay “On Being 17, Bright, and Unable to Read,” Helen Keller’s “The Day Language Came into My Life,” or Malcolm X’s “Coming to an Awareness of Language,” you might, for example, be inspired to write about a powerful language experience you have had and how that experience, in retrospect, was a “turning point” in your life.
On a second level, reading provides you with information, ideas, and perspectives for developing your own paper. In this way, you respond to what you read, using material from what you’ve read in an essay. For example, after reading Richard Lederer’s essay on regional language differences in America, you might want to elaborate on what he has written, drawing on your own experiences and either agreeing with his examples or generating better ones for the area of the country in which you were raised. You could also qualify his argument for the preservation of these language differences or take issue with it. The three mini-debates in Chapter 14 “Arguing about Language” offer you the opportunity to read extensively about focused topics—“Should English Be the Law?,” “Should Language Be Censored?,” and “How Do Words Hurt?”—and to use the information and opinions expressed in these essays as resources for your own thesis-driven paper.

On a third level, active reading can increase your awareness of how others’ writing affects you, thus making you more sensitive to how your own writing will affect your readers. For example, if you have been impressed by an author who uses convincing evidence to support each of her claims, you might be more likely to back up your own claims carefully. If you have been impressed by an apt turn of phrase or absorbed by a writer’s new idea, you may be less inclined to feed your readers dull, worn out, and trite phrases. More to the point, however, the active reading that you will be encouraged to do in Language Awareness will help you to recognize and analyze the essential elements of the essay. When you see, for example, how a writer like Susanne K. Langer uses a strong thesis statement, about how language separates humans from the rest of the animal kingdom, to control the parts of her essay, you can better appreciate the importance of having a clear thesis statement in your writing. When you see the way Deborah Tannen uses transitions to link key phrases with important ideas so that readers can recognize clearly how the parts of her essay are meant to flow together, you have a better idea of how to achieve such coherence in your own writing. And when you see the way Donna Woolfolk Cross uses a division and classification organizational plan to differentiate clearly the various categories of propaganda, you see a powerful way in which you too can organize an essay using this method of development.

Finally, another important reason to master the skills of critical reading is that you will be your own first reader and critic for everything you write. How well you are able to scrutinize your own drafts will powerfully affect how well you revise them, and revising well is crucial to writing well. Reading others’ writing with a critical eye is a useful and important practice; the more you read, the more practice you will have in sharpening your skills. The more sensitive you become to the content and style decisions made by the writers in Language Awareness, the more skilled you will be at making similar decisions in your own writing.

Nothing is more important to your success in school and in the workplace than learning to write well. You’ve heard it so often you’ve probably become numb to the advice. Let’s ask the big question, however. Why is writing well so important? The simple answer is that no activity develops your ability to think better than writing does. Writing allows you to develop your thoughts and to “see” and reflect critically on what you think: In that sense, writing also involves your twin sister, reading. Writing well often means organizing your thoughts into a compelling argument and engaging readers by using concise, specific language. Small wonder, then, that academic programs and employers in all fields are constantly looking for people who can read and write well. Simply put, the ability to read and write well is a strong indication of a good mind.

College is a practical training ground for learning to write and think well. Whenever you write in college, you are writing as a member of a community of scholars, teachers, and students. By questioning, researching, and writing in company with other members of the college community, you come both to understand college material and to demonstrate your knowledge of it. In college, with the help of instructors, you will write essays, analyses, term papers, reports, reviews of research, critiques, and summaries. What you learn now will be fundamental, not only to your education, but also to your later success, no matter what career you intend to pursue.

DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE WRITING PROCESS

Writers cannot rely on inspiration alone to produce effective writing. Good writers follow a writing process: They analyze their assignment, gather ideas, draft, revise, edit, and proofread. It is worth remembering, however, that the writing process is rarely as simple and straightforward as it might appear to be. Often the process is recursive, moving back and forth among different stages. Moreover, writing is
personal — no two people go about it exactly the same way. Still, it is possible to describe basic guidelines for developing a writing process, thereby allowing you to devise your own reliable method for undertaking a writing task.

1. Understand Your Assignment

Much of your college writing will be done in response to specific assignments from your instructors or research questions that you develop in consultation with your teachers. Your environmental studies professor, for example, may ask you to write a report on significant new research on carbon dioxide emissions and global warming; your American history professor may ask you to write an analysis of the long-term effects of Japanese Americans’ internment during World War II. From the outset you need to understand precisely what your instructor is asking you to do. The keys to understanding assignments such as these are **subject** words (words that focus on content) and **direction** words (words that indicate your purpose for and method of development in writing). For example, consider what you are being asked to do in each of the following assignments:

Tell about an experience you have had that dramatically revealed to you the importance of being accurate and precise in your use of language.

Many languages are lost over time because speakers of those languages die. When a language is lost, the particular culture embodied in the language is also lost. Using an extinct language and culture as an example, explain how the language embodies a culture and exactly what is lost when a language becomes extinct.

Advocates of the English-only movement want to see English adopted as our country’s official language. Argue for or against the philosophy behind this movement.

In the first example above, the **subject** words are *experience* and *importance of being accurate and precise in your use of language*. The **direction** word is *tell*, which means that you must share the details of the experience so that your readers can appreciate them as if they were there, sharing the experience. The **content** words in the second example are *languages, culture, and extinct language and culture*. The **direction** word is *explain*. In the third example, the **content** words are *English-only movement and our country’s official language*. The **direction** word is *argue*. In each case the **subject** words limit and focus the **content**, and the **direction** words dictate how you will approach this content in writing.

The words *tell, explain, and argue* are only a few of the **direction** words that are commonly found in academic writing assignments. The following list of additional **direction** words and their meanings will help you better understand your writing assignments and what is expected of you.

- **Direction Words**
  - **Analyze**: take apart and examine closely
  - **Categorize**: place into meaningful groups
  - **Compare**: look for differences, stress similarities
  - **Contrast**: look for similarities, stress differences
  - **Critique**: point out positive and negative features
  - **Define**: provide the meaning for a term or concept
  - **Describe**: give detailed sensory perceptions for a person, place, or event
  - **Evaluate**: judge according to some established standard
  - **Identify**: recognize or single out
  - **Illustrate**: show through examples
  - **Interpret**: explain the meaning of a document, action, event, or behavior
  - **Prove**: demonstrate truth by logic, fact, or example
  - **Synthesize**: bring together or make meaningful connections among elements

After reading an assignment several times, check with your instructor if you are still unsure about what is being asked of you. He or she will be glad to clear up any possible confusion before you start writing. Be sure, as well, that you understand any additional requirements of the assignment, such as length or format.

2. Find a Subject and Topic

Although your instructor will sometimes give you specific writing assignments, you will often be asked to choose your own subject and topic. In a course in which you are using *Language Awareness*, you would in this case first select a broad subject within the area of language studies that you think you may enjoy writing about, such as professional jargon, dialects, political speeches, advertising language, or propaganda. A language issue that you have experienced firsthand (discrimination, for example) or something you’ve read may bring other subjects to mind. In the student essay that concludes this chapter, Rebekah Sandlin revisits her own racial prejudices as an elementary school student and what she has learned from them. You might also consider a language-related issue that involves your career ambitions,
such as the areas of business (avoiding exaggerated advertising claims), law (eliminating obscure legal language), nursing (communicating effectively with patients), or journalism (reporting the news objectively). Another option is to list some subjects you enjoy discussing with friends and that you can approach from a language perspective: music (gender bias in rap lyrics), work (decoding insurance policies and medical benefits), and college life (speech codes on campus).

Next, try to narrow your general subject until you arrive at a topic that you think will be both interesting to your readers and appropriate for the length of your paper (and the time you have to write it). The following chart shows how the general areas of jargon, journalism, and television commercials might be narrowed to a specific essay topic. If you’re having trouble coming up with general subjects or specific topics, try some of the discovery techniques discussed in Step 3 (pp. 27–30).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Subject Area</th>
<th>Narrowed Topic</th>
<th>Specific Essay Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jargon</td>
<td>Medical jargon</td>
<td>Medical jargon used between doctors and terminally ill patients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalism</td>
<td>Slanted language in newswriting</td>
<td>Slanted language in newspapers’ coverage of international events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television commercials</td>
<td>Hidden messages in television commercials</td>
<td>Hidden messages in television commercials on children’s Saturday morning programs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**USE THE WRITING SUGGESTIONS IN LANGUAGE AWARENESS.** As far as writing about the subjects and topics discussed in Language Awareness is concerned, there is no shortage of ideas and approaches at your disposal. There are at least two Writing Suggestions at the end of every selection in the book. If you have the freedom to choose your own subject and topic, and the approach you take, you may want to use one of the suggestions as a springboard for your own creativity. If, on the other hand, you are assigned a Writing Suggestion, be sure you understand what is being asked of you. If you are unclear about the assignment or you want to widen or narrow its focus or change its intent in any way, be sure to do so in consultation with your instructor. You can and should be creative in using even an assigned suggestion, maybe even using it as a starting point for your own research and thesis, but again get your instructor’s approval before starting your paper so no misunderstandings result.

**DETERMINE YOUR PURPOSE.** All effective writing springs from a clear purpose. Most good writing seeks specifically to accomplish any one of the following three purposes:

- To express thoughts and feelings about life experiences
- To inform readers by explaining something about the world around them
- To persuade readers to adopt some belief or take some action

In expressive writing, or writing from experience, you put your thoughts and feelings before all other concerns. When Malcolm X shows his frustration at not having appropriate language to express himself (Chapter 4) and when Amy Tan describes how her mother’s use of English shaped her own approach to writing (Chapter 6), each one is writing from experience. In each case, the writer has clarified an important life experience and has conveyed what he or she learned from it.

Informative writing focuses on telling the reader something about the outside world. In informative writing, you report, explain, analyze, define, classify, compare, describe a process, or examine causes and effects. When Paul Roberts explains the formation of speech communities (Chapter 6) and when Deborah Tannen explores the fraught language of mother-daughter relationships (Chapter 13), each one is writing to inform.

Argumentative writing seeks to influence readers’ thinking and attitudes toward a subject and, in some cases, to move them to a particular course of action. Such persuasive writing uses logical reasoning, authoritative evidence, and testimony, and it sometimes includes emotionally charged language and examples. In writing their arguments, Robert D. King (Chapter 14) uses numerous historical examples to make the case that a multilingual America does not threaten national unity and Kim Severson (Chapter 12) uses logical reasoning and evidence to debunk the healthy image of so-called “all natural!” products.

**KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE.** The best writers always keep their audience in mind. Once they have decided on a topic and a purpose, writers present their material in a way that empathizes with their readers, addresses their difficulties and concerns, and appeals to their rational and emotional faculties. Based on knowledge of their audience, writers make conscious decisions on content, sentence structure, and word choice.

Writing for an Academic Audience. Academic writing most often employs the conventions of formal standard English, or the language of educated professionals. Rather than being heavy or stuffy, good academic writing is lively and engaging and holds the reader’s attention by presenting interesting ideas supported with relevant facts, statistics, and detailed information. Informal writing, usually freer and simpler in form, is typically used in notes, journal entries, e-mail, text messages, instant messaging, and the like.

In order not to lessen the importance of your ideas and your credibility, be sure that informal writing does not carry over into your academic
writing. Always keeping your audience and purpose in mind will help you achieve an appropriate style.

When you write, your audience might be an individual (your instructor), a group (the students in your class), a specialized group (art history majors), or a general readership (readers of your student newspaper). To help identify your audience, ask yourself the questions posed page 27.

Using Discipline-Specific Language  The point of discipline-specific language, sometimes referred to as professional language or even jargon, is not to make a speaker or writer sound like a scientist, or a humanities scholar, or a geologist. Rather, discipline-specific language provides a kind of “shorthand” means of expressing complex concepts. Its proper use will grow from your knowledge of the discipline, from the reading you have done in the field, and from the hours you have spent in the company of your teachers and peers.

While the meaning of some disciplinary language will become clear to you from context as you read and discuss course material, some of it, left undefined, will present a stumbling block to your understanding of the material. Glossaries of disciplinary terms exist for most disciplines: Make use of them. Also, never be shy about asking your instructor or more experienced classmates for help when you’re unsure of the meaning of a term.

Considering Opposing Arguments  You will likely not have trouble convincing those who agree with your argument from the outset, but what about those who are skeptical or think differently from you? You need to discover who these people are by talking with them or by reading what they have written. Do your research, be reasonable, and find common ground where possible, but take issue where you must. To refute an opposing argument, you can present evidence showing that the opposition’s data or evidence is incomplete or distorted, that its reasoning is faulty, or that its conclusions do not fit the evidence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal versus Informal Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Formal Writing</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses standard English, the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>language of public discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>typical of newspapers, magazines,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>books, and speeches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses mostly third person</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Informal Writing**           |
| Uses nonstandard English,     |
| slang, colloquial expressions  |
| (anyways, dude, freaked out), |
| and shorthand (OMG, IMHO,      |
| GR8)                         |
| Uses first and second person  |
| most often                   |

Avoids most abbreviations      Uses abbreviations and acronyms (Prof., bros., mpg, Net, DVR)
(Professor, brothers, miles per gallon, Internet, digital video recorder)

Uses an impersonal tone         Uses an informal tone (*It was great the way she answered questions at the end of her talk.*)
(The speaker took questions from the audience at the end of her lecture.)

Uses longer, more complex      Uses shorter, simpler sentences
sentences

Adheres to the rules and       Takes a casual approach to the
conventions of proper grammar  rules and conventions of proper
grammar

**Questions about Audience**
- Who are my readers? Are they a specialized or a general group?
- What do I know about my audience’s age, gender, education, religious affiliation, economic status, and political views?
- What does my audience know about my subject? Are they experts or novices?
- What does my audience need to know about my topic in order to understand my discussion of it?
- Will my audience be interested, open-minded, resistant, or hostile to what I have to say?
- Do I need to explain any specialized language so that my audience can understand my subject? Is there any language that I should avoid?
- What do I want my audience to do as a result of reading my essay?

3. Gather Ideas

Ideas and information (facts and details) lie at the heart of good prose. Ideas grow out of information; information supports ideas. Before you begin to draft, gather as many ideas as possible and as much information as you can about your topic in order to inform and stimulate your readers intellectually.
Most writers use one or more discovery techniques to help them gather information, zero-in on a specific topic, or find connections among ideas. In addition to your reading and discussing writing ideas with your classmates and friends, you may want to experiment with some of the discovery techniques explained below.

**KEEPPING A JOURNAL.** Many writers use a journal to record thoughts and observations that might be mined for future writing projects. They have learned not to rely on their memories to retain ideas, facts, and statistics they have heard or read about. Writers also use journals to keep all kinds of lists: lists of questions they would like answers to; lists of issues that concern them; lists of topics they would like to write about someday.

To aid your journal writing as you use this text, each reading selection in *Language Awareness* begins with a journal prompt called “Writing to Discover.” The purpose of each prompt is to get you thinking and writing about your own experiences with the language issues discussed in the selection before you start reading. You thus have the opportunity to discover what you already know about a particular topic and to explore your observations, feelings, and opinions about it. The writing you do at this point is something you can always return to after reading each piece.

**FREEWRITING.** Journals are also useful if you want to freewrite. Freewriting is simply writing for a brief uninterrupted period of time—say, ten or fifteen minutes—on anything that comes to your mind. It is a way to get your mind working and to ease into a writing task. Start with a blank sheet of paper or computer screen and write about the general subject you are considering. Write as quickly as you can, don’t stop for any reason, and don’t worry about punctuation, grammar, or spelling. Write as though you were talking to your best friend, and let your writing take you in any direction. If you run out of ideas, don’t stop; just repeat the last few things you wrote over and over again, and you’ll be surprised—more ideas will begin to emerge. Just as regular exercise gets you in shape, regular freewriting will help you feel more natural and comfortable when writing.

**OPEN-ENDED WRITING.** A useful extension of freewriting is a discovery strategy called open-ended writing. Follow the same directions for freewriting but also stop every ten minutes or so to evaluate what you have written. Analyze your freewriting and identify ideas, issues, expressions, phrases, and terms that show relationships and themes, and that may also engender questions about your material. Copy only those related elements onto a new sheet of paper and begin freewriting again. By repeating the process at least several times, following your freewrites with analysis each time, you will inevitably sharpen your thinking about your topic and get closer to being able to write your first draft.

**BRAINSTORMING.** Another good way to generate ideas and information about a topic is to brainstorm—to list everything you know about a topic, freely associating one idea with another. Don’t worry about order or level of importance. Try to capture everything that comes to mind because you never know what might prove valuable later on. Write quickly, but if you get stalled, reread what you have written; doing so will help you move in new directions. Keep your list handy so that you can add to it over the course of several days. Here, for example, is a student’s brainstorming list on why Martin Luther King Jr.’s speech, “I Have a Dream,” has endured:

- Why “I Have a Dream” is Memorable
  - civil rights demonstration in Washington, D.C., delivered on steps of Lincoln Memorial
  - repetition of “I have a dream”
  - references to the Bible, spirituals
  - “bad check” metaphor
  - other memorable figures of speech
  - 200,000 people
  - reminds me of other great American documents and speeches—Declaration of Independence and Gettysburg Address
  - refers to various parts of the country
  - embraces all races and religions
  - sermon format
  - displays energy and passion

**ASKING QUESTIONS.** Asking questions about a particular topic or experience may help you generate information before you start to write. If you are writing about a personal experience, for example, asking questions may refresh your memory about the details and circumstances of the incident or help you discover why the experience is still so memorable. The newspaper reporter’s five Ws and an H—Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How—are excellent questions to start with. One student, for example, developed the following questions to help her explore an experience of verbal abuse:

1. Who was involved in the abusive situation?
2. What specific language was used?
3. Where did the abuse most often take place?
4. When did the verbal abuse first occur?
5. Why did the abusive situation get started? Why did it continue?
6. How did I feel about the abuse as it was happening? How do I feel about it now?

As the student jotted down answers to these questions, other questions came to mind, such as, What did I try to do after the verbal abuse
occurred? Did I seek help from anyone else? How can I help others who are being verbally abused? Before long, the student had recalled enough information for a rough draft about her experience.

CLUSTERING. Another strategy for generating ideas and gathering information is clustering. Put your topic, or a key word or phrase about your topic, in the center of a sheet of paper and draw a circle around it. (The student example below shows the topic “Hospital jargon at summer job” in the center.) Draw three or more lines out from this circle, and jot down main ideas about your topic, drawing a circle around each one. Repeat the process by drawing lines from the main-idea circles and adding examples, details, or questions you have. You may wind up pursuing one line of thought through many add-on circles before beginning a new cluster.

One advantage of clustering is that it allows you to sort your ideas and information into meaningful groups right from the start. As you carefully sort your ideas and information, you may begin to see an organizational plan for your writing. In the following example, the student’s clustering is based on the experiences he had while working one summer in a hospital emergency room. Does the clustering provide any clues to how he might organize his essay?

4. Formulate a Thesis

The thesis of an essay is its main idea, the major point the writer is trying to make. A thesis should be

- The most important point you make about your topic
- More general than the ideas and facts used to support it
- Focused enough to be covered in the space allotted for the essay

The thesis is often expressed in one or two sentences called a thesis statement. Here’s an example of a thesis statement about television news programs:

The so-called serious news programs are becoming too like tabloid news shows in both their content and their presentation.

A thesis statement should not be a question but rather an assertion. If you find yourself writing a question for a thesis statement, answer the question first—this answer will be your thesis statement.

An effective strategy for developing a thesis statement is to begin by writing, “What I want to say is that . . .”

What I want to say is that unless language barriers between patients and health care providers are bridged, many patients’ lives in our most culturally diverse cities will be endangered.

Later you can delete the formulaic opening, and you will be left with a thesis statement.

To determine whether your thesis is too general or too specific, think hard about how easy it will be to present data—that is, facts, statistics, names, examples or illustrations, and opinions of authorities—to support it. If you stray too far in either direction, your task will become much more difficult. A thesis statement that is too general will leave you overwhelmed by the number of issues you must address. For example, the statement “Political attack speeches damage the American political system” would lead to the question “How?” To answer it, you would probably have to include information about national politics, free speech, libel, character assassination, abusive language, the fallacy of ad hominem arguments, and so on. To cover all of this in the time and space you have for a typical college paper would mean taking shortcuts, and your paper would be ineffective. On the other hand, too specific a thesis statement would leave you with too little information to present. “Governor Wright’s speech implies that Senator Smith’s personal life is a disgrace” does not leave you with any opportunity to develop an argument. An appropriate thesis statement like “Political attack speeches have harmed politicians’ images and turned off voters in Big City’s mayoral elections over the past decade” leaves room for argument but can still be proven by examining poll responses, voter turnout records, and other evidence.
The thesis statement is usually presented near the beginning of the essay. One common practice in shorter college papers is to position the thesis statement as the final sentence of the first paragraph.

Is Your Thesis Solid?

Once you have a possible thesis statement in mind, ask yourself the following questions:

- Does my thesis statement take a clear position on an issue? (Could I imagine someone agreeing or disagreeing with it? If not, it might be a statement of fact, instead of an arguable thesis.)
- Will I be able to find evidence that supports my position? Where? What kinds? (If you’re unsure, it wouldn’t hurt to take a look at a few secondary sources at this point.)
- Will I be able to make my claims and present sufficient evidence to support it in a paper of the assigned length, and by the due date? (If not, you might need to scale back your claim to something more manageable.)

5. Support Your Thesis with Evidence

The types of evidence you use in your academic writing will be determined to some extent by the discipline in which you are working. For example, for a research project in psychology on the prejudice shown toward people with unusual names, you will almost certainly rely heavily on published studies from peer-reviewed journals. Depending on the assignment, however, you might also devise an experiment of your own or interview people with unusual names to gather firsthand accounts of their experiences. For an argument essay on the same topic in a composition course, as in many courses in the humanities, languages, and literatures, you would cite a wide range of sources, perhaps including—but not limited to—peer-reviewed journals. Depending on the assignment, you might also include your own experience and informal observations.

To support her argument on book banning, one student derives most of her evidence from an array of experts, as in the following example, where she cites scholar Henry Reichman:

Henry Reichman writes that in 1990, Frank Mosca’s All-American Boys (1983) and Nancy Garden’s Annie on My Mind (1982), two books with gay themes, were donated to high schools in Contra Costa, California; at three of these high schools, the books were seized by administrators and then “lost” (53).

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES. In general, researchers and writers work with two types of evidence: primary sources and secondary sources.

Primary sources in the humanities and languages/literatures are works that grow out of and are close to a time, place, or culture under study. These can include documents such as letters, speeches, interviews, manuscripts, diaries, treaties, maps; creative written works such as novels, plays, poems, songs, and autobiographies; and three-dimensional artifacts such as paintings, sculptures, pottery, weaving, buildings, tools, and furniture. Primary sources in the social, natural, and applied sciences are the factual reports and descriptions of discoveries, experiments, surveys, and clinical trials.

Secondary sources in the humanities and languages/literatures restate, analyze, and interpret primary sources. Common secondary sources include analyses, critiques, histories, and commentaries in the form of books, articles, encyclopedia entries, and documentaries. Secondary sources in the sciences analyze and interpret discoveries and experiments and often comment on the validity of the research models and methods and the value of those discoveries and experiments.

Writing in a specific discipline requires that you use the most authoritative and reliable source materials available for that discipline. Your instructor can guide you in this regard by either providing you with a list of resources commonly used in their fields or directing you to such a list in your library or on the Internet. Many academic libraries include helpful subject study guides on their home pages as well.

For a brief guide to finding, evaluating, and documenting sources in print and online, see pages 548–551.

FACTS, STATISTICS, EXAMPLES, AND EXPERT TESTIMONY. The evidence you use in your academic writing should place a high value on facts and statistics, examples and illustrations, and the testimony of experts. You must be accurate in your use of facts and statistics, and you must check and double-check that you have cited them correctly. Be sure that you carefully consider the examples and illustrations you use to support your thesis: Use those that work best with your subject and the audience you have in mind. Finally, be selective in citing the works and comments of experts in your discipline. If you choose wisely, the works of respected scholars and experts will be immediately recognizable to others familiar with the subject area, and your argument will have a much better chance of succeeding.

The following passage illustrates how student Jake Jamieson uses examples in his paper on the Official English movement:

Ed Morales, the author of Living in Spanglish, reports that the mayor of Bogota, New Jersey, called for a boycott of McDonald’s restaurants after the “company displayed a billboard advertising a new iced coffee drink in Spanish,” calling “the ad . . . ‘offensive’ and ‘divisive’ because it sends a message that Hispanic immigrants do not need to learn English” (par. 2–3).
6. Determine Your Organization

There are several organizational patterns you might follow in drafting an essay. Most of you are already familiar with the most common one — chronological order. In this pattern, which is often used to narrate a story, explain a process, or relate a series of events, you start with the earliest event or step and move forward in time.

In a comparison-and-contrast essay, you might follow a block pattern or a point-by-point organization. In a block pattern, a writer provides all the information about one subject, followed by a block of comparable information about the other subject. In a point-by-point comparison, on the other hand, the writer starts by comparing both subjects in terms of a particular point, then compares both on a second point, and so on. In an essay comparing two dialects of American English, for example, you could follow the block pattern, covering all the characteristics of one dialect and then all the characteristics of the other. Alternatively, you could organize your material in terms of defining characteristics (for example, geographical range; characteristics of speakers; linguistic traits), filling in the details for each dialect in turn.

Other patterns of organization include moving from the general to the specific, from smallest to largest, from least important to most important, or from the usual to the unusual. In an essay about medical jargon, for instance, you might cover its general characteristics first and then move to specifics, or you might begin with what is most usual (or commonly known) about doctors’ language and then discuss what is unusual about it. Whatever order you choose, keep in mind that what you present first and last will probably stay in the reader’s mind the longest.

After you choose an organizational pattern, jot down the main ideas in your essay. In other words, make a scratch outline. As you add more information and ideas to your scratch outline, you may want to develop a formal, more detailed outline of your paper. In writing a formal outline, follow these rules:

1. Include the title of your essay, a statement of purpose, and the thesis statement.
2. Write in complete sentences unless your meaning is immediately clear from a phrase.
3. If you divide any category, make sure there are at least two subcategories. The reason for this is simple: You cannot divide something into fewer than two parts.
4. Observe the traditional conventions of formal outlining. Notice how each new level of specificity is given a new letter or number designation.

7. Write Your First Draft

Sometimes we are so eager to get on with the writing of a first draft that we begin before we are ready, and the results are disappointing. Before beginning to write, therefore, ask yourself, “Have I done enough prewriting? Is there a point to what I want to say?” If you have done a thorough job of gathering ideas and information, if you think you can accomplish the purpose of your paper, and if you are comfortable with your organizational plan, your answers will be “yes.”

If, however, you feel uneasy, review the various prewriting steps to try to resolve the problem. Do you need to gather more information? Sharpen your thesis? Rethink your purpose? Refine your organization? Now is the time to think about these issues, to evaluate and clarify your writing plan. Time spent at this juncture is time well spent because it will not only improve your paper but will save you time and effort later on.

As you write, don’t be discouraged if you do not find the most appropriate language for your ideas or if your ideas do not flow easily. Push ahead with the writing, realizing that you will be able to revise the material later, adding information and clarifications wherever necessary. Be sure to keep your audience in mind as you write, so that your diction and coverage stay at the appropriate level. Remember also to bridge all the logical and emotional leaps for your audience. Rereading what you have already written as you go along will help you to further develop your ideas and tie them together. Once completed, a first draft will give you a sense of accomplishment. You will see that you have something to work with, something to build on and improve during the revision process.

8. Revise

After you complete your first draft, you will need to revise it. During the revision stage of the writing process, you will focus on the large
issues of thesis, purpose, evidence, organization, and paragraph structure to make sure that your writing says what you want it to say. First, though, it is crucial that you set your draft aside for a while. Then you can come back to it with a fresh eye and some objectivity. When you do, resist the temptation to plunge immediately into a second draft: Scattered changes will not necessarily improve the piece. Instead, try to look at your writing as a whole and to tackle your writing problems systematically. Use the following guidelines:

- Make revisions on a hard copy of your paper. (Triple-space your draft so that you can make changes more easily.)
- Read your paper aloud, listening for parts that do not make sense.
- Ask a fellow student to read your essay and critique it.

A Brief Guide to Peer Critiquing

When critiquing someone else’s paper:

- Read the essay carefully. Read it to yourself first, and then, if possible, have the writer read it to you at the beginning of the session. Some flaws become obvious when read aloud.
- Ask the writer to state his or her purpose for writing and to identify the thesis statement within the paper itself.
- Be positive, but be honest. Never denigrate the paper’s content or the writer’s effort, but do your best to identify how the writer can improve the paper through revision.
- Try to address the most important issues first. Think about the thesis and the organization of the paper before moving on to more specific topics like word choice.
- Do not be dismissive, and do not dictate changes. Ask questions that encourage the writer to reconsider parts of the paper that you find confusing or ineffective.

When someone critiques your work:

- Give your reviewer a copy of your paper before your meeting.
- Listen carefully to your reviewer, and try not to discuss or argue each issue. Record comments, and evaluate them later.

- Do not get defensive or explain what you wanted to say if the reviewer misunderstands what you meant. Try to understand the reviewer’s point of view, and learn what you need to revise to clear up the misunderstanding.
- Consider every suggestion, but only use the ones that make sense to you in your revision.
- Be sure to thank your reviewer for his or her effort on your behalf.

One way to begin the revision process is to compare the earlier outline of your first draft to an outline of how it actually came out. This will help you see, in abbreviated form, the organization and flow of the essential components of your essay and perhaps detect flaws in reasoning.

Another method you can use in revising is to start with large-scale issues, such as your overall structure, and then concentrate on finer and finer points. As you examine your essay, ask yourself about what you have written and address the large elements of your essay: thesis, purpose, organization, paragraphs, and evidence.

Revising the Large Elements of an Essay

- Is my topic specific enough?
- Does my thesis statement identify my topic and make an assertion about it?
- Is my essay organized the best way, given my purpose?
- Are my paragraphs adequately developed, and does each support my thesis?
- Have I accomplished my purpose?
- How effective is my beginning? My ending?
- Is my title effective?

Once you have addressed the major problems in your essay by writing a second draft, you should be ready to turn your attention to the finer elements of sentence structure, word choice, and usage.
Revising Sentence-Level Elements

- Do my sentences convey my thoughts clearly, and do they emphasize the most important parts of my thinking?
- Are my sentences stylistically varied?
- Is my choice of words fresh and forceful, or is my writing weighed down by clichés and unnecessary wordiness?
- Have I made any errors of usage?

Finally, if you find yourself dissatisfied with specific elements of your draft, look at several essays in Language Awareness to see how other writers have dealt with the particular situation you are confronting. For example, if you don’t like the way the essay starts, find some beginnings you think are particularly effective; if your paragraphs don’t seem to flow into one another, examine how various writers use transitions; if an example seems unconvincing, examine the way other writers include details, anecdotes, facts, and statistics to strengthen their illustrations. Remember that the readings in the text are there as a resource for you as you write.

9. Edit and Proofread

Now that you have revised in order to make your essay “right,” it is time to think about making it “correct.” During the editing stage of the writing process, check your writing for errors in grammar, punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and manuscript format. Both your dictionary and your college handbook will help you answer specific editing questions about your paper.

Addressing Common Editing Problems and Errors

- Do my verbs agree in number with their subjects?
- Do my pronouns have clear antecedents—that is, do they clearly refer to specific nouns earlier in my sentences?
- Do I have any sentence fragments, comma splices, or run-on sentences?
- Have I made any unnecessary shifts in person, tense, or number?
- Have I used the comma properly in all instances?
- Have I checked for misspellings, mistakes in capitalization, and typos?

Having revised and edited your essay, you are ready to print your final copy. Be sure to proofread your work before submitting it to your instructor. Even though you may have used your computer’s spell checker, you might find that you have typed worm instead of word, or form instead of from. Also check to see that your essay is properly line spaced and that the text is legible.

The following essay was written by Rebekah Sandlin while she was a student at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. After Rebekah read the essays in the chapter on prejudice, stereotypes, and language, her instructor, Linda Parks, asked her to write a personal experience with biased language and how that language affected her. Rebekah vividly remembered an experience she had in the third grade, when she used the phrase “just like a nigger” to mock a classmate. Using that experience as the starting point of her essay, she then traces a series of subsequent encounters she had with the word nigger and recounts her resulting personal growth. By the end of her essay, Rebekah makes it clear to her readers why she felt compelled to tell her story.

Sandlin 1

Rebekah Sandlin

English 111 sec. BD

October 23, 2011

Paper #3

The "Negro Revolt" in Me

She said “seven” when the answer was clearly “ten.” We were in the third grade and had been studying multiplication for a few weeks. Our teacher, Mrs. Jones, reminded Monica that “we are multiplying now, not adding. Five times two will always be ten.” I laughed at Monica. How did she not know the answer to five times two? We had been over it and practiced it so many times. My laughter encouraged the other kids in the
class to join in with me. Within seconds the laughing had escalated into pointing fingers and calling her stupid. That's when "it" happened. That's when I said what I will always regret for the rest of my life. I said, "Just like a nigger."

Playing on her weaknesses in math, laughing at her, encouraging the rest of the class to point at her, and calling her the most degrading word in history still eats at my insides. The class stopped laughing.

Monica cried. Mrs. Jones gasped and yanked me into the hallway where she scolded me for a good half an hour. That is how I learned that language could be used as a dangerous tool. That's when I learned about prejudice and its effects on people. That's how it happened. This is how it has affected my life.

Mrs. Jones sent me home with a note explaining my "behavior" in class. I remember being terribly afraid to give that note to my mom. I felt guilty, confused, and embarrassed, but I wasn't sure why I felt that way. No one had taken the time to explain to me why the word had such a negative connotation. No one told me that blacks were once treated terribly wrong or that they were used as slaves. No one told me about the interracial rapes that occurred on plantations or about the children being taken and sold to rich white landowners. No one told me about them being denied an education and proper shelter. No one told me. I was just a small white girl living in a predominately white city and going to a predominately white school. I knew nothing about diversity and equal rights for everyone. I knew nothing.

My mom sat me down at the kitchen table and asked me how I could have said such a terrible thing. "Where did you learn that word?" she asked. She sounded furious and embarrassed. She kept asking me where I had heard the word and who taught it to me. Before I had a chance to respond she knew the answer. My dad was on the phone in the next room talking to his father. He was laughing and he said, "just like a nigger." My mom lowered her head and whispered, "go to your room." I quietly got up and obeyed her command. I'm not sure what she said to him. But I could hear their mumbled fighting through the vents.

I pressed my ear to the vent on the floor to try and make sense of my mother's cries. It was no use. Two hours later they came upstairs to give me one of their "you did something wrong" speeches. Except this speech was different from most. It began with an apology and an attempt to justify my father's words.

It started with a story. My dad grew up on a tobacco farm in southern Georgia. His family hired blacks to work out in the fields.

"No," he reassured, "they weren't slaves. We paid them." His family was prejudiced toward blacks. Their language and actions rubbed off onto my dad. The only difference was that my dad learned that what he said and how he treated blacks was wrong. Through growing up and living in integrated working environments, he learned how "not to act" in the presence of a black person. However, when he talked to his father he still acted and talked like he was prejudiced. He said that he didn't understand why he did it other than he desperately wanted to be accepted by his own father. He admitted that he was wrong and told me that I was lucky because I was going to learn the "real way" to treat people. He promised to never use the word again as long as I promised to do the same thing. I agreed.

I was in the fifth grade the next time I heard the word used. Ironically, I was in a math class again. Except this time I didn't say it, someone else did. Unlike Monica, this girl didn't cry. Instead, she gave an evil glare. I was the one that stood up to say something in her defense. I yelled at Dan and told him that what he had said was rude and degrading. "How would you like it if someone called you honky?"
I screamed. He hauled off and hit me right in the arm! He called me a „nigger-lover.”

The teacher broke it up, and we were sent to the principal’s office.

I was suspended for using vulgar language. I had used the word “honkey.” Dan was given a warning and sent back to class. I had plenty of time to think about what I had done wrong while I waited in the office for my mom to come and pick me up. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn’t see what I had done wrong. That girl did not want to be called a nigger. I was just trying to show him what it would feel like if someone had said something like that to him. My mom did not agree with me. I learned an important lesson that day. Using bad words to stop other bad words is like using violence to stop violence—it doesn’t work. My mom was supportive and said that she respected what I was trying to do but next time I should use better sense. I didn’t want there to be a next time.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO WRITE WITH SOURCES?

Some of the writing you do in college will be experiential—that is, based on your personal experiences—but many of your college assignments will call upon you to do some research, to write with sources. While most of us have had some experience with basic research practices—locating and evaluating print and online sources, taking notes from those sources, and documenting those sources—we have not learned how to integrate these sources effectively and purposefully into our papers. (For more information on basic research and documentation practices, see Chapter 15, “A Brief Guide to Writing a Research Paper,” pp. 543–568.)

Your purpose in writing with sources is not to present a collection of quotations that show you can report what others have said about your topic. Your goal is to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize the materials you have researched so that you can take ownership of your topic. You learn how to view the results of research from your own perspective and arrive at an informed opinion of your topic. In short, you become a participant in a conversation with your sources about your topic.

To help you on your way, this chapter provides advice on (1) summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting sources, (2) integrating summaries, paraphrases, and quotations into the text of your paper using signal phrases, and (3) avoiding plagiarism when writing with sources. In addition, one student paper models different ways of engaging meaningfully with outside sources and of reflecting that engagement in writing.

WRITE WITH SOURCES

Each time that you introduce an outside source into your paper be sure that you are using that source in a purposeful way. Outside sources can be used to

• support your thesis and main points with statements from noted authorities,
• offer memorable wording of key terms or ideas,
• extend your ideas by introducing new information, and
• articulate opposing positions for you to argue against.